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FIAE Reflections

Chapter 1

In this chapter the author introduces the idea that differentiated instruction is doing what is fair for students. He also brings up the point that is does not mean teachers are making learning easier for students but that it provides an appropriate challenge for students to thrive. The author talks about how people are concerned that when teachers do this they are making future not differentiated experiences more difficult for students. He addresses this by saying that when teachers differentiate, they give students the tools to handle whatever comes their way whether it is differentiated or not. I really liked that the author said “our goal as teachers is to be fair and developmental appropriate, not one-size-fits-all equal”. This statement confirmed what I believe teachers should be, fair. The goal he states is basically the title of the book. Fair isn’t always equal. Most importantly, I feel, a teacher’s job is to be fair to all students. Equal comes with it because as a teacher you are giving each student an equal opportunity to succeed in your class. The concept of fair but equal will impact the way that I teach and the way I treat my students. Grading tests in a math class is a good example of this, some students may get more points off on a problem than other students when they originally made the same mistake. If a student calculates a number wrong but gets the problem correct for the number they calculated, they wouldn’t get as many points off as a student who calculated the wrong number and got the problem wrong for the number they calculated.

Chapter 2

This chapter talked about what exactly mastery is. One of the things that I learned was that not everyone has the same definition of what mastery is which makes it difficult to determine if a student has mastered a subject. One of the things that the author suggested was to talk to the school district and colleagues to see what their idea of mastery is and to come up with a common definition of mastery. The author also suggests looking at the curriculum and the standards to see what exactly mastery should mean to us as teachers and what it should mean in the classroom. One of the big ideas that I got out of this chapter was that it is important for you, your colleagues, and school district to have the same definition or general idea of what mastery means so that you can determine if your students have mastered the material or not. One of the things that the author said was that the curriculum is subject teacher’s interpretation. This will impact the way that I teach the standards and the curriculum because it is nice to know that I have some say in the way that I teach the standards and the material that has to be covered instead of the curriculum saying “say this and then say that”. In this chapter the book says “to demonstrate sophisticated mastery, we’d like students to make an inference and elaborate on how they arrived at their conclusion in writing, orally, or some other way”. This will impact how I determine mastery in each of my student’s in the classroom.

Chapter 3

This chapter talked a lot about assessments and how to plan assessments. One of the main points in the chapter was that students achieve more when they have a clear picture of the expectations. This chapter also related a lot to stage one of creating a unit. It talked about in what order a teacher should plan assessments. The order that the book suggests is to first plan summative assessments, then pre-assessments. The last step is to plan formative assessments. The book also suggests that a teacher should plan for frequent formative assessments. The author says that the important thing is that the students learned the material. This is where the chapter connects to stage 1. The chapter talks about essential questions and understandings. The chapter then goes on to talk about making assessments authentic. I learned that there is two steps in this process. The first is to make sure that the assessment is close to how students will apply their learning in real world applications. The second is that the assessment needs to be authentic to how students are learning. One of the things in this chapter that really stood out to me is that in order for an assessment to be valid it must be varied and done over time. This chapter on assessment will definitely impact the way that I make lesson plans. I know that it is good to write out the assessments when I am making lessons plans. This chapter will also influence my formative assessments. I will incorporate them often into my lesson plans this way my students and I know how they are doing during the process of learning the new material.

Chapter 4

This chapter outlines three important choices for assessments. The chapter starts by talking about the benefits of portfolios. One of the benefits that the book highlights is the fact that teachers can collect work and examine it over time which means that teachers don’t have to make as many inferences about a student’s mastery based on single samplings. Another important thing that I learned about portfolios is that they are a wonderful mirror for students to see their own development and take charge of their learning. The biggest benefit that portfolios have is that they promote the ideals of differentiated classes. The next choice the book highlighted was rubrics. I learned that they can be difficult to make and that there are many things that need to be considered when creating rubrics such as what the task requires, what consists as proficiency in the task, and whether the criteria is clear for the person who is performing the task. The chapter also tells the reader how to create a rubric. This will have a big impact on me in this class. Since we will eventually have to create rubrics, the tips that this chapter gives will help me create one. The last thing that the chapter talks about is self- assessment. This is extremely important because it provides feedback and helps the student and the teacher set individual goals. Knowing that these three methods of assessment work well in a differentiated classroom will impact me when I am creating lesson plans and making sure that my class is a differentiated classroom.

Chapter 5

The big idea in this chapter is tiering. For the purpose of the book and the chapter the author states that tiering emphasizes the adjustments teachers make in assessment according to students’ readiness levels. In this chapter I learned that it is important to start tiering by expecting every student to demonstrate full proficiency with the standard this way the minimum expectation is the standard or the benchmark performance. I also learned that it is helpful to list every skill or bit of information a student must use in order to meet the need of the task or assignment successfully. As teachers we can do this since most of the material we teach has subsets of skills and content that we can break down for students. This chapter talked about learning contracts and why they were beneficial for some students to have. I learned that they allow students to work at their own pace and that they are teacher and student designed tasks that fulfill the expectations of the unit. I also learned that checkpoints are listed on most contracts. The checkpoint listed help the teacher assess student progress and possibly change the instruction as a result and they keep students dedicated to the tasks and learning. Other things can be helpful when tiering are tic-tac-toe boards, cubing, summarization pyramid. Two other important ideas in this chapter which majorly impacted me were Frank William’s Taxonomy of Creativity and RAFT(S). Using tiering when making my lesson plans will be helpful down the road when I need it instead of having to go back and incorporate them into my lessons and assessments later.

Chapter 6

This chapter mainly talked about tests and what makes up a good test. I learned about mixing traditional and non-traditional questions in a test and about mixing forced choice and constructed response questions in a test. I learned what is considered traditional and not traditional. Traditional questions tend to be true/false, matching, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, definitions, essays, and short answers. Non-traditional questions tend to be questions that incorporate analogies, drawings, diagrams, demonstrations/performances, more than one topic, and brainstorming. I learned the difference between forced choice and constructed response questions. Forced choice questions are questions and prompts that require students to choose from the responses provided by the teacher. Constructed response questions are questions or prompts for which students must generate the information themselves and apply it in the manner requested by the teacher. Some key points that the chapter pointed out about tests were the less students have to guess, the more they can achieve; and students appreciate meaty tasks more than drudgery tasks. Some tips that the chapter gave teachers were to give smaller more frequent tests, to list the standards at the top of the test, and to arrange challenge level of the problems either by starting easy and getting progressively harder or to mix the level throughout the test. The tips and suggestions that this chapter gave will impact me when making lesson plans and when creating tests. Knowing what makes a good test will help me evaluate tests that I will create and see if I have incorporated the things that make a good test into my tests.